

# Cashing in on socialist 'crimes'

"CONFESSION," color film by Costa-Gavras,  
based on book by Artur London. Paramount.

"We are confronted by two types of social contradictions—those between ourselves and the enemy and those among the people themselves. The two are totally different in their nature."

Mao Tsetung

The political trials which wracked Eastern Europe in the early 1950s represent one of the most sordid and despicable pages in the history of the world revolutionary movement. The most notorious of these "show trials" took place in Czechoslovakia in 1952, in which 14 leading members of the Czech Communist party were convicted of treason and various crimes against the state. Eleven of these were executed, including Rudolph Slansky, secretary-general of the Czech CP. Most of the accused were Jews, a fact of no small importance in all the circumstances surrounding these events.

In the "thaw" following Stalin's death and in the shock-waves flowing from the revelations of Khrushchev's report, it was revealed that these men—and scores of others like them in other countries—had been unjustly accused, illegally tried, and immorally dispensed with. One troubling question in the entire affair was that the defendants had all "confessed" to their crimes. Observers in the courtroom asserted that the men did not appear to be under undue duress at the time, that their physical condition seemed good and that there seemed to be every opportunity for any of them to renounce his "confession" in open court. None did so, each reciting a litany of "crimes" which seemed incredible at the time.

One of the survivors of the Slansky trial, Artur London, has written a memoir of those events which undertakes to explain what happened. I have not read the book, but a motion picture based upon it, "Confession," reveals a pattern of psychological torture and fantastic mind manipulation which, while not resolving all of the questions inherent, does explain some of what took place at that time.

It is a brutally terrifying film, made in the same pseudo-documentary style which its director, Costa-Gavras, employed in "Z." And like "Z," it is a "political" film which never goes beyond the outer appearance of both incidents and people.

And so, the first question which must be asked is: Are the contradictions in a fascist state between the popular forces and the police apparatus and the contradictions in a socialist state which resulted in the perpetration of such gross violations of revolutionary justice, the same kind of contradictions?

"The contradictions between ourselves and the enemy and the contradictions among the people must be resolved by different methods. To put it briefly, the former are a matter of drawing a clear distinction between ourselves and the enemy and the latter a matter of drawing a clear distinction between right and wrong."

Mao Tsetung

Counted in the price the revolutionary forces of the world must pay for the deterioration of socialist morality is the fact that not only the class enemy, but sympathetic "liberals" like Costa-Gavras find it all too easy to equate the criminality of fascism with the violations of socialism—failing to see that the one is a central characteristic of a political system while the other is a distortion.

Now I have no intention of minimizing the criminal responsibility of those in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland who committed these acts. Nor am I satisfied with the explanations of those events which attribute them solely to the machinations of the CIA or the temporary rise to power of power-seeking, unsocialized elements, although I do not discount those factors. My main criticism of the Khrushchev report of 1956 and the various admissions of wrong-doing elsewhere in Eastern Europe is that they did not explore fully enough, nor deeply enough, the reasons why such crimes could take place within a socialist framework.